



STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Kristina Solberg, P.E.
NCDOT Project Manager
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Gaston County East-West Connector Study

CITIZENS INFORMATIONAL WORKSHOP

How YOU can get involved...

When: Tuesday, September 30, 2003

4:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Where: Ashbrook High School Cafeteria

2222 South New Hope Road
Gastonia, NC 28054 (see map on front)

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), NCDOT will provide auxiliary aids and services for disabled persons who wish to participate in the Citizens Informational Workshop. To receive special services, please contact Ms. Kristina Solberg by phone (919) 733-7844 extension 310 or fax (919) 733-9794 to provide adequate notice prior to the date of the meeting so that arrangements can be made.



For questions or comments about the proposed project, to be added to the project mailing list, to receive future newsletters, or to request a presentation or meeting with you or your group, contact Jill Gurak, Consultant Project Manager:

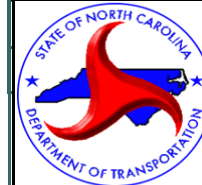
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**Questions? Call the
PROJECT HOTLINE 800-475-6402**



Gaston County East-West Connector Study Gaston and Mecklenburg Counties

TIP Project Number U-3321

Issue 2 ? September 2003

NCDOT Begins the Gaston County East-West Connector Study

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) proposes to improve east-west travel between I-85 west of Gastonia in Gaston County and I-485/NC 160 in Mecklenburg County.

The enclosed map shows the overall project study area outlined in pink. It consists of the following general boundaries: I-85 to the north, the South Carolina state line to the south, the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport to the east, and the I-85 and US 29-74 junction to the west.

The Gaston County East-West Connector Study is designated as TIP Project No. U-3321 in the NCDOT's 2004-2010 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP shows Project U-3321 as a multi-lane highway on new location from I-85 west of Gastonia to NC 160 in Mecklenburg County.

TIP Project No. U-3321 is one of two projects that make up the new roadway known locally as the "Garden Parkway". The other project is TIP Project No. R-2608. The TIP calls for Project R-2608 to be a four-lane divided freeway on a new location from I-85 west of Gastonia to US 321 north of Gastonia. TIP Project No. R-2608 is not included in the Gaston County East-West Connector Study.

The Gaston Urban Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the regional transportation planning partnership responsible for setting transportation priorities, led an extensive effort to develop a corridor for the Garden Parkway as part of the *Thoroughfare Plan* development process.

The corridor developed in the *Thoroughfare Plan* is one of many new roadway alternatives that will be evaluated during

the Gaston County East-West Connector Study. These new roadway alternatives will be located in the portion of the overall study area that is outlined in green on the enclosed map. Neither the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) nor the NCDOT have recommended a preferred alternative at this time.

On September 24, 2002, North Carolina lawmakers approved a bill to create a Turnpike (Toll) Authority. The bill permits the Turnpike Authority to build and operate three toll projects statewide. The proposed Gaston County East-West Connector Study may be one of the three toll projects. The NCDOT's current studies do not depend on whether or not the project is designated as a toll road project.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS !

First Citizens Informational Workshop Scheduled for September 30!

Tuesday, September 30, 2003

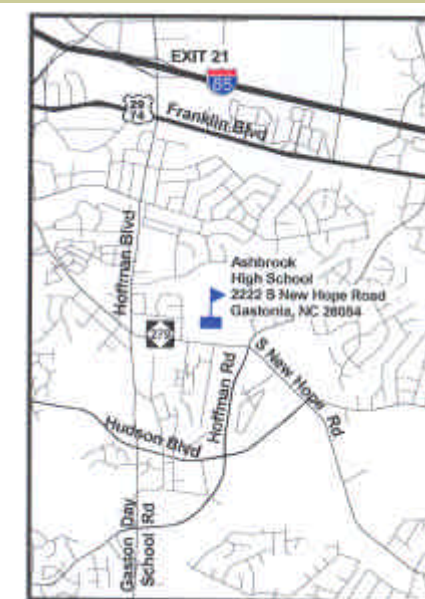
4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

**Ashbrook High School Cafeteria
2222 South New Hope Road in Gastonia
(see map to the right)**

The workshop will be an informal open-house with project maps and other information available for review. You are invited to drop in at any time to ask questions and offer comments. The NCDOT Study Team representatives will be present for one-on-one discussions about the proposed project.

This workshop is being held to familiarize citizens with the proposed project and to gather input/comments on potential alternatives. Maps and aerial photography of the project study area will be displayed.

We encourage your comments on this project and will provide comment forms at the workshop. [Can't make the workshop?](#) You can also call a member of the NCDOT Study Team with your comments, write a letter, or send an e-mail (see back page).



Ashbrook High School

Preliminary Alternatives to be Evaluated

The project development, engineering, and environmental studies for the project will be conducted in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

In accordance with Federal Highway Administration guidelines, several types of preliminary alternatives will be evaluated for their ability to meet the project's purpose and need:

- **The No-Build or Do Nothing Alternative**
- **Minor Capital Improvements to Existing Roadways** (*this could include measures such as computerized traffic signals, intersection improvements, improved signs, etc.*)
- **Travel Demand Management** (*this could include ridesharing, HOV lanes, telecommuting, etc.*)
- **Mass Transit** Alternative(s)
- **Multi-Modal** Alternative(s) (*this could include combinations of mass transit, travel demand management, and minor improvements*).
- **Improve Existing Roadways** (*this could include widening and other improvements to US 29-74 and/or I-85*)
- **Build a New Highway** (*several preliminary corridors will be developed and evaluated*)

The preliminary alternatives will include all alternatives previously developed during the MPO's thoroughfare planning process and any alternatives suggested by citizens or other government agencies.

From this wide range of preliminary alternatives, those that best meet the project's purpose and need will be identified. These alternatives will be studied in depth in the next step of the planning process, Step 3 (see below).

The NEPA Planning Process

The project planning process for transportation projects subject to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) can be divided into the eight steps listed to the right.

Currently, the proposed project is in the beginning stages of **Step 2**.

The NCDOT is developing a Land Suitability Map (part of Step 2) for the project study area. THE MAP WILL BE SHOWN AT THE CITIZENS INFORMATIONAL WORKSHOP. The map shows notable features that exist in the project study area, including, but not limited to, neighborhoods, rivers and streams, wetlands, schools, parks, airports, federally-protected plants and animals, historic properties, and hazardous waste sites. The NCDOT Study Team will use this map to determine suitable locations of preliminary corridors for a new highway.

Results from Step 1 - The Project Need

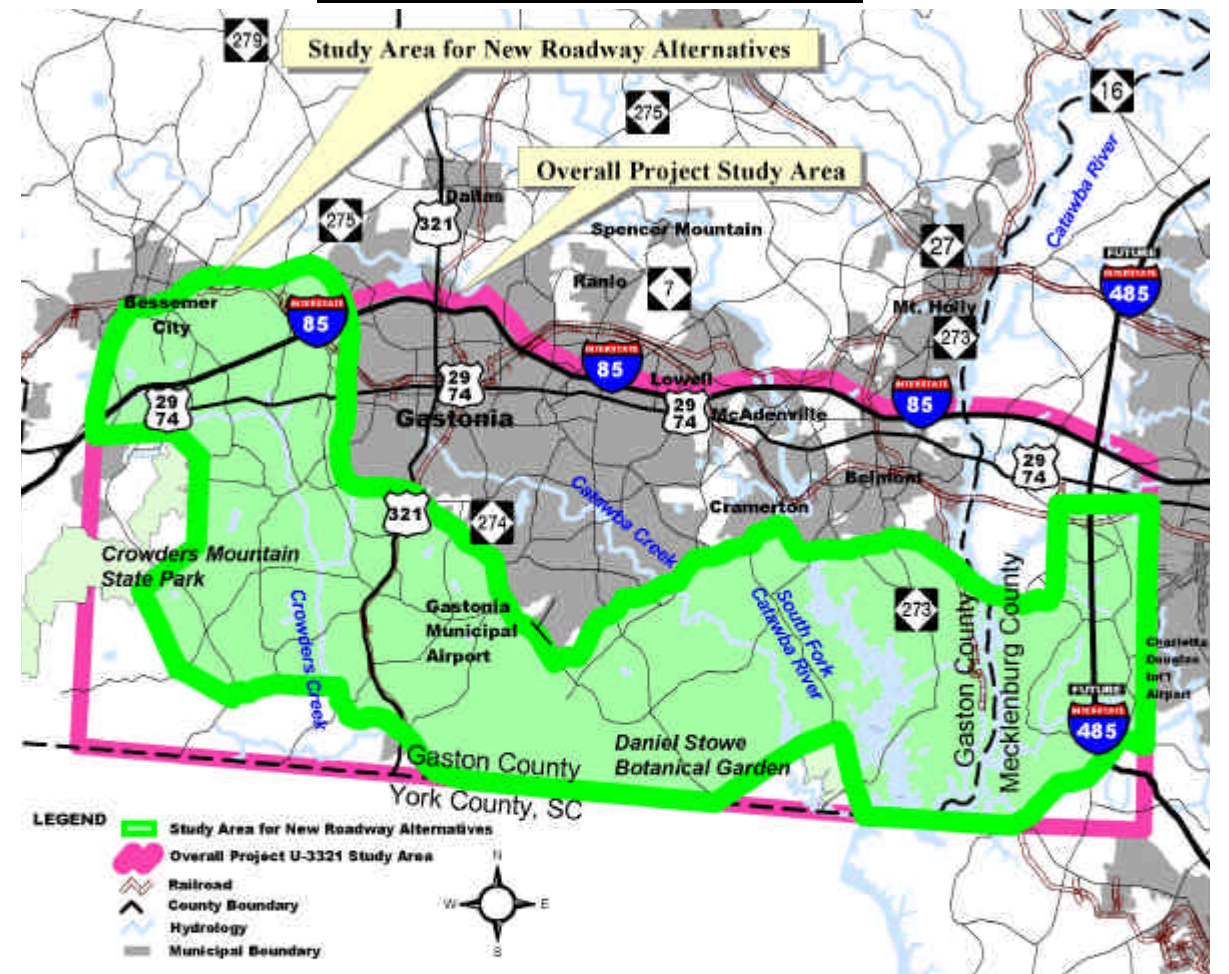
Transportation needs for southern Gaston County and western Mecklenburg County were identified in **Step 1** of the eight-step NEPA planning process. These are listed below.

- **Improve mobility, access, and connectivity in southern Gaston County and between southern Gaston County and Mecklenburg County**
- **Reduce congestion and improve traffic flow on the sections of I-85, US 29-74, and US 321 in the project study area; improve high-speed, safe regional travel service along the US 29-74 intrastate corridor; and generally improve safety and reduce above-average accident rates in the project study area**

THE 8-STEP PLANNING PROCESS

1. Data Collection, Identify Existing Deficiencies, Define Study Area, Statement of Purpose and Need
2. **Land Suitability Mapping, First Citizens Informational Workshop, Identify Preliminary Alternatives, Second Citizens Informational Workshop, Select Alternatives for Detailed Study**
3. Engineering Studies, Detailed Field Studies, Environmental Analyses
4. Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)
5. Corridor/Design Public Hearing
6. Review comments on DEIS (Step 4) and transcript from Corridor Public Hearing (Step 5), Select Preferred Alternative
7. Final Environmental Impact Statement, Record of Decision (ROD)
8. Design Public Hearing

PROJECT LOCATION MAP



Note:

Other Preliminary Alternatives include: No-Build, Minor Capital Improvements, Travel Demand Management, Mass Transit, Multi-Modal, and Improve Existing Roadways (see previous page).

What Happens Next?

A Citizens Informational Workshop to discuss potential alternatives for the proposed project is scheduled for **Tuesday, September 30, 2003, from 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.** in the **Ashbrook High School Cafeteria at 2222 South New Hope Road in Gastonia.**

After the workshop, the NCDOT Study Team will consider public and agency input in developing preliminary alternatives. Each alternative will be evaluated and screened based on its ability to achieve the project's purpose and need and potential impacts on the human and natural environments.

A second Citizens Informational Workshop will be held to present the preliminary alternatives and results of the screening evaluation. Based on the evaluations and comments received from the public and local, state, and federal agencies, the NCDOT Study Team will identify the preliminary alternatives to be studied in detail in the next phase of the process.

A newsletter and newspaper advertisements will announce the second Citizens Informational Workshop and another newsletter will announce the identified Detailed Study Alternatives.

In-depth engineering and environmental studies will be conducted on these Detailed Study Alternatives (Step 3 of the planning process). The results of these in-depth studies will be summarized in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Step 4).

